



THE KATHMANDU POST

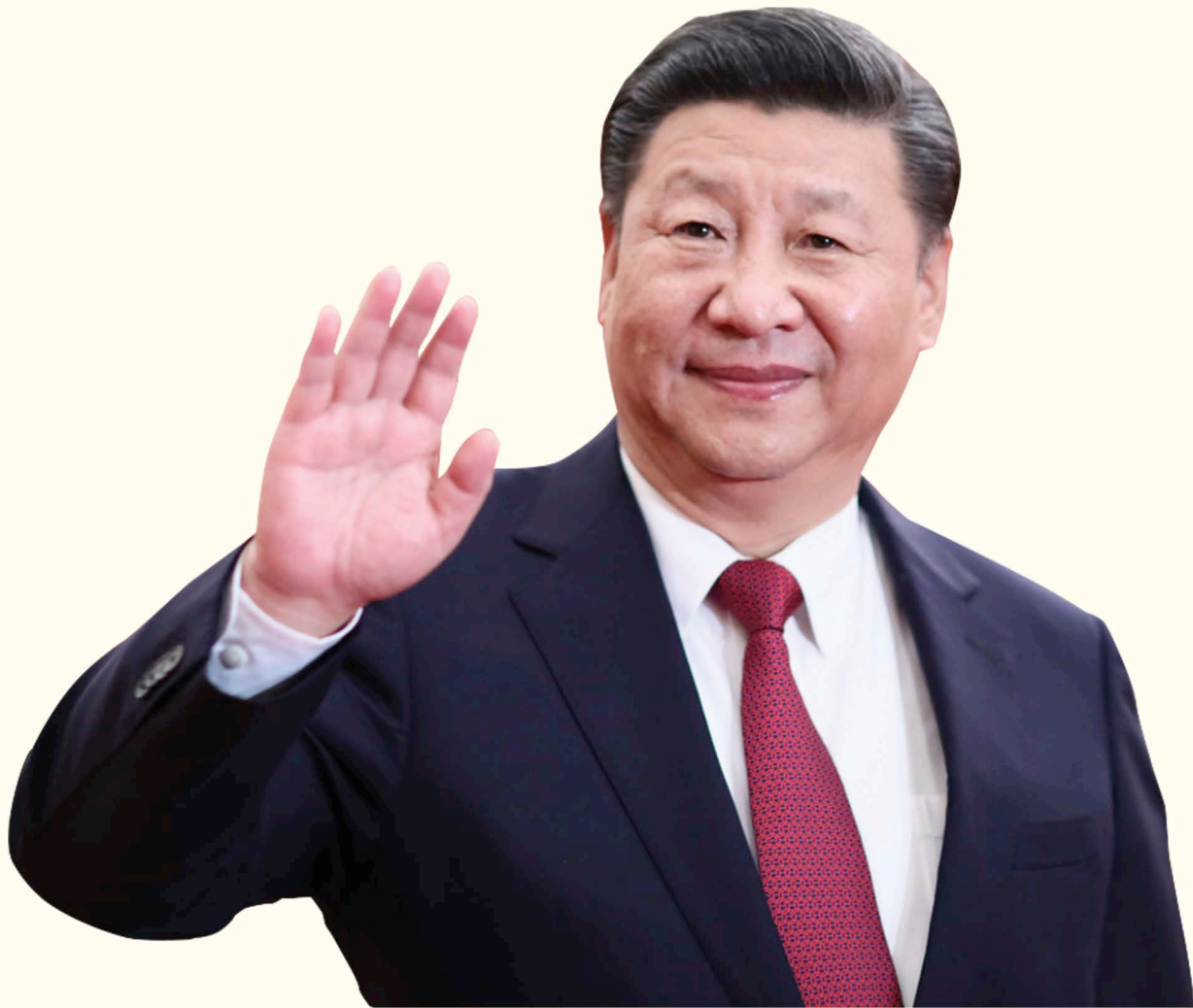
WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily
Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXVII No. 232 | 16 pages | Rs.5
Saturday, October 12, 2019 | 25-06-2076

33.4° C 5.5° C
Nepalgunj Jumla

Heartily Welcome!



His Excellency Xi Jinping
(Honourable President of the People's Republic of China)

We would like to extend our cordial welcome to the
Honourable President of the People's Republic of China
His Excellency Xi Jinping
to Kathmandu, Nepal



中尼喜马拉雅学会
Society of Sino-Nepalese Himalayan Studies



祝贺中尼关系进入新时代

Felicitatation on New Era of Sino-Nepalese Relationship

祝愿中尼人民友谊地久天长

Long Live Sino-Nepalese Friendship



中尼喜马拉雅学会
Society of Sino-Nepalese Himalayan Studies



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXVII No. 232 | 16 pages | Rs. 5
Saturday, October 12, 2019 | 25-06-2076

33.4°C 5.5°C
Nepalgunj Jumla



Army personnel patrol a street in Kathmandu on Friday, a day before Chinese President Xi Jinping arrives in Nepal on a two-day state visit.

Chinese President Xi to sign at least a dozen agreements in Kathmandu

While the 1,200MW Budhi Gandaki hydroelectricity project is set to be revived, an agreement is also expected on the detailed project report for the Kathmandu-Kerung railway line.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, OCT 11

On Saturday, Kathmandu will roll out the red carpet for Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is paying a two-day state visit to Nepal. During his 20-hour stay in Kathmandu, Xi will hold a whirlwind round of meetings with Nepali leaders and officials, including President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and former prime ministers Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

All eyes, however, are on the pacts and understandings the two neighbours will sign and the political implications of a Chinese president's visit to Nepal after 23 years. Xi will be overseeing the signing of at least a dozen agreements between Nepal and China.

Prime Minister Oli held an hours-long meeting with several ministers on Friday evening to finalise the number of pacts to be signed during Xi's visit. However, official communication has not been forthcoming.

While a number of articles on the



President Xi Jinping waves after his arrival at the airport in Chennai, India, on Friday.

agenda for Xi's visit were approved by a Cabinet meeting on Thursday, officials remain tight-lipped on the number of agreements to be signed with the Chinese side as negotiations were ongoing with both sides exchanging the texts of various agreements as of Friday evening.

High on the agenda, according to multiple officials the Post spoke to, is the preparation of the detailed project report of the Kerung-Kathmandu railway on a Chinese grant. Nepal will also be seeking an understanding on the railway's investment modality, which will be discussed during the visit but agreed upon later, according to two senior officials privy to the Xi visit agenda. Possible financing modalities include a grant, a soft loan from China, and investment from Nepal. Finances, however, will only be finalised once the detailed project report is complete.

Consensus, however, has been reached on two important agreements regarding the development of Nepal's energy sector.

>> Continued on page 4

Parties agree on transitional justice officials but recommendation committee disagrees

Political consensus may be necessary but the committee's independence should not be undermined, taskforce members say.

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, OCT 11

On September 26, Nepal Communist Party Co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal said that chairpersons and members for the two transitional justice commissions "will be appointed in a few days". At the same programme, organised by the National Human Rights Commission, Nepali Congress leader Minendra Rijal echoed Dahal, saying the two commissions will get leadership before Dashain and that consultation for an amendment to the Transitional Justice Act will begin after the festive holidays.

At the programme, Dahal, who led the decade-long 'people's war', also said that he takes responsibility for "all the positive and negative implications of the insurgency" and that he is ready to face action for his mistakes.

The Dashain holidays are now over but there is still no sign of progress in the appointment of officials to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons.

The scheduled meeting of the recommendation committee, formed to select officials for the two commis-

sions, was postponed until Dashain. There has been no update on when the committee will hold its meeting.

Officials familiar with the developments say that though the parties have agreed on 10 names for the commissions—two chairpersons and four members each—not all members of the recommendation committee are willing to accept the parties' decision.



While the chairperson of the committee, former chief justice Om Prakash Mishra, hasn't made his position clear, Prakash Osti, who represents the National Human Rights Commission in the committee, and Sharmila Karki, a committee member, are opposed to selecting officials for the commissions as recommended by

the political parties.

Prem Bahadur Khadka, chairman of the Nepal Bar Association, and Ram Nath Mainali, a senior advocate, who represent the Nepali Congress and the Dahal camp respectively, however, are in favour of moving forward as per the decision of the parties.

The cross-party leadership wants to reinstate all five members of the disappearance commission led by Lokendra Mallick, but Osti and Karki are especially opposed to this decision.

"It is true that political consensus is necessary on the issue," Karki, who represents the former CPN-UML camp in the ruling Nepal Communist Party, told the Post. "That, however, does not mean that the committee should follow what the parties say."

Karki also questioned the rationale behind relieving all the officials from the commissions if they were to be reappointed.

Osti, the human rights commission member on the selection committee, also said that the committee, as an independent body, will not accept decisions taken at the behest of the parties.

>> Continued on page 4

Security is tightened as Xi Jinping arrives today

Besides regular patrols across Kathmandu, police presence has notably increased around Tibetan refugee settlements.

SHUVAM DHUNGANA

KATHMANDU, OCT 11

The government has significantly stepped up security in Kathmandu in anticipation of Chinese President Xi Jinping's two-day state visit starting Saturday.

"All four security agencies—Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and the National Investigation Department—will be mobilised during the Chinese president's visit," Ram Krishna Subedi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Home Affairs, told the Post. "All necessary security arrangements have been made, right from Tribhuvan International Airport to the hotel where the Chinese president will be staying."

The Nepal Army has been working in close coordination with the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and the National Investigation Department.

More than 15,000 security personnel in multiple layers will remain on standby for round-the-clock security, according to the Nepal Army. Officials said that Chinese security personnel in great numbers are also in Kathmandu for Xi's visit.

"This is probably the highest number of security deployment for any visiting foreign dignitary," Brigadier General Bigyan Dev Pandey, spokesperson for the Nepal Army, told the Post. "A separate command and control room headed by a senior Nepal Army official is being set up at Nepal Army Headquarters to monitor the security situation."

The Army will also conduct air patrols across the route Xi will be travelling.

In addition to regular patrols across Kathmandu, the police presence has

notably increased around Tibetan refugee settlements in Ekantakuna and Boudha. According to locals, police personnel have been stationed in large numbers at the entrance to the Tibetan refugee settlement in Ekantakuna from the beginning of Dashain.

Srijana Bhattarai, who has been operating a grocery store inside the Ekantakuna settlement area for nearly a decade, said that seeing police in the neighbourhood is not new, especially when there are celebrations, like on the birthday of the Dalai Lama. But this level of surveillance is uncommon, she said.

"Having police around here is not unusual. They hang around for a bit and leave, but for the past 10 days or so, they are here at all hours, from dawn to late night," said Bhattarai. "I hear it's because of the Chinese president's visit."

Over the past few days, police have also arrested at least 18 people "for questioning". "Of them, some are Tibetan refugees," said Deputy Superintendent Hobindra Bogati, spokesperson for the Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range. "They were taken into custody for questioning. It is part of our security exercise in view of a high profile visit."

According to Superintendent of Police Rabi Kumar Poudel, spokesperson for the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division, the route to be travelled by Xi and his entourage will be closed to the general public and they'll have to use alternative routes on Saturday and Sunday.

"We don't yet know the exact time of his arrival but the route which he will take during his visit across town will be closed," Poudel told the Post.

>> Continued on page 4

EDITORIAL | 6

Walking the tightrope

Xi's visit is likely to have tremendous political significance but how Nepal calibrates its foreign policy will be key.

WARM WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY
CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING

热烈欢迎中华人民共和国主席
习近平阁下访问尼泊尔



We wish this historic visit of His Excellency will take Nepal China relations to new heights.



Dr. Kalyan Raj Sharma,
President,
Nepal China Friendship Forum



Much hype, little work to show: Rasuwagadhi border point lies in a state of disrepair

While the Chinese side of the border has received a major facelift, that of Nepal remains in a sorry state.

BALARAM GHIMIRE
RASUWA, OCT 11

The 2015 earthquakes led to a blockade of two major border points to China: Rasuwagadhi and Tatopani. Rasuwagadhi reopened about seven months after the earthquakes in December 2015. Most of the imports from China are coming through this border crossing since, with the Tatopani border reopening only in May-end this year.

Rasuwigadhi also hogged the lime-light after it played a crucial role in importing daily essentials during the Indian imposed economic blockade. It has gained more prominence of late having been declared the gateway to the proposed China-Nepal rail service. Both Nepali and Chinese governments have placed the border in top priority.

But, while the Chinese side of the border has gone through a significant facelift in terms of infrastructure development, that on the Nepali side remains in a sorry state.

The Chinese side has a proper blacktopped road and modern buildings. Its checkpoint is armed with state-of-the-art equipment. The condition on the Nepali side of the border is

in sharp contrast to that. Plumes of dust swirl in the air whenever a vehicle plies the road. And when it rains, the road turns into muddy mess ridden with potholes, with landslide threats lurking. Adding to the woes are complaints from officials and locals of increased irregularities at the customs. The Nepali custom lacks essential security equipment such as ‘vehicle x-ray’ and ‘metal detector’, according to traffic police, who operate from a shabby hut.

Businessmen complain of having to go through hassles in security check-ups. The import office and customs office are at a distance of 1.5 km from each other. Moreover, the customs office does not have ample parking space. “Merchants have had to face several hurdles to import goods,” said Niraj Rai, customs chair of Nepal Chamber of Commerce. “It’s business with a significant risk of natural disasters.”

While the Nepali government seems indifferent, the Chinese side has started giving the Syafrubesi-Rasuwigadhi a facelift, said Rai. “If only the road was blacktopped, the merchants could import double the amount of goods they are doing now,” Rai said.



The Chinese side of the border has been restored with impressive infrastructure.



Maitighar Mandala is lit up on the eve of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s state visit to Nepal.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

Dalits await homes under People’s Housing Programme

Although the plan was to construct 109 houses for Dalits in Baglung last year, construction has been left incomplete.

PRAKASH BARAL
BAGLUNG, OCT 11

The family of Jayaram Darji has long been waiting for a new home to be built under the government’s People’s Housing Programme.

The impoverished Dalit family of Rismi village in Galkot Municipality in Baglung district has been living in their neighbour’s hut as their new home remains incomplete.

“The walls and the door and wind frames of our new home were built last year. The construction has not progressed since,” Darji said.

Darji’s family has never owned a home. They were pleased when the government announced the housing programme. They had never imagined that their pleasure would turn to dismay.

Darji started building a small home for his family with Rs 83,333 the government had provided as a first instalment of the housing programme. The money was spent on building walls

and installing door and window frames.

Darji would require the second and the third instalments of the housing aid to complete the home. But the government has not released the money yet. “The house is not even complete and it already looks rundown,” Darji said.

Under the People’s Housing Programme, the government had pledged to provide Rs 333,000 each to the recipient families to construct a two-room house.

Like the Darjis, there are nine Dalit families in Galkot Municipality who have yet to receive the second and the third instalments of the housing aid.

According to the Urban Development and Building Construction Division Office in Baglung, their homes should have been completed in the fiscal year 2017/18.

Trilok Thapa, ward chairman of the municipality, said the housing programme could not achieve the

The government had pledged to provide Rs 333,000 each to families to build a two-room house.

desired results in time as the government did not allocate the budget required to complete the construction of new homes for the Dalit families.

“These families have been frequenting their concerned municipal ward offices asking for the budget, but we cannot do anything,” said Thapa. “It is the Urban Development and Building Construction Division Office that should be allocating the budget for the programme.”

The government had announced the programme targeting the impover-

ished Dalit families in Baglung in 2013.

Under the housing programme, the authorities concerned had announced to construct 109 houses in the district last year. The majority of those houses remain incomplete due to the budget shortage.

Tejendra Paudel, acting chief at the Urban Development and Building Construction Division Office, said many impoverished people like the Darjis were suffering for want of a roof over their heads.

“But we cannot address their concern until the centre releases the budget for the programme,” said Paudel.

Indra Lal Sapkota, a state assembly member of Gandaki Province, said he had been raising the issue in the assembly but to no avail.

“The Ministry of Finance should be serious about implementing the programme to provide homes to these low-income families,” he said.

Movement to reform education takes off in Dang

Local units have started monitoring government schools to ensure quality education.

DURGALAL KC
DANG, OCT 11

In Dang, local units have started a movement to reform the local education system.

As part of this initiative, Tulsipur Sub-metropolis has started to merge community schools whereas Rapti Rural Municipality has started to provide primary education free of cost.

At the 54th executive meeting of the sub-metropolis, it was decided that schools would have an Early Childhood Development Centre instead of classes (grade one up to grade five). Mukunda Rijal, an official at the Education Section, said that the Early Childhood Development Centre will run regularly. And according to him, 35 schools have decided to implement the centre, which will be teaching students in the English language.

The sub-metropolis is also preparing to adjust the number for teachers in each school as per the number of students, as there are some schools that have too many students and too few teachers and vice versa. The number of students in the majority of the schools in the area is below 100.

Bhaskar Raj Gautam, chief at the Education Section of the sub-metropolis, said that they have started to identify the schools that have few students. “We cannot keep providing a salary to teachers,” said Gautam, adding that teachers who are currently teaching in schools with few students will be transferred to schools where teachers are less and students plenty.

According to the data of the Education Section, 58 teachers have already been transferred to other schools in the last academic year.

Gautam said that they have also been moving forward with the concept of forming a “mega-school”, a merger of a number of community schools. There are 83 community schools in total in the sub-metropolis. According to Gautam, the plan is to merge schools and limit the number of schools in the Sub Metropolis to 30.

Ghana Shyam Pandey, chief at the



Students at a government-run school in Tulsipur Sub-metropolis. As part of the local government’s initiative to provide quality education, the sub-metropolis has started merging community schools.

POST PHOTO

sub-metropolis, said, “Our plan is to cancel classes and merge schools to cut expenses. We have decided to take the decision following many field studies.” He also added that they are going to pass the education act to roll out the campaign.

Meanwhile, Rapti Rural Municipality has started to provide primary education free of cost. Numananda Subedi, chairman of the rural municipality, said that they have been spending Rs 11.1 million for the

As part of the drive, teacher numbers in schools are set to be adjusted as well.

salary and allowances of teachers (who were appointed through the private fund of the schools) every year.

Subedi said, “The students at the primary level are studying free of cost after the local unit provided the salary and allowance to the teachers who have been appointed through the private fund of the schools. Because of this, the dropout rate has reduced.”

Other local units like Shantinagar and Bangalachuli Rural Municipalities have also monitoring government schools to ensure quality education in the district.

Experts to conduct census of the Demoiselle cranes

As part of their migration pattern, the cranes have entered India from the Mustang-Bheri river route, ornithologists say.

HARIHAR SINGH RATHOUR
JAJARKOT, OCT 11

Swoops of Demoiselle crane (Grus virgo), commonly known as Karyankurung in Nepal, fly in from Siberia over the Tibetan highlands in China to the Himalayas every year looking for a warmer climate.

The area’s tough climatic conditions usually hinder these cranes’ journey, forcing them to layover in Upper Mustang, Kaligandaki and Bheri Corridor on their way to Rajasthan and Gujarat in India.

To make use of this annual occurrence, a group of ornithologists—including Mitra Pandey and Hirulal Dangaura—have been staying in Upper Mustang (from September 29) to conduct the census of the species. The team is stationed in the region for a month.

According to the Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), the global population of this species is around 230,000 to 261,000. On October 7, six groups of Demoiselle crane entered India from the Mustang-Bheri River corridor

route. Krishna Bhusal, director at the BCN, said that cranes migrated from Kaligandaki corridor due to bad weather this year.

According to the study, the cranes reach Mustang at around noon (12:00 pm) if they start their journey early in the morning from Tibet.

The BCN has been studying Demoiselle crane from the last five years. “Usually crane raises its chicks during monsoon and enters India to avoid the extreme cold during winter,” said Bhusal, adding that they return to their own habitat (Mongolia and Russia) to hatch eggs.

Wetlands are the habitat of the Demoiselle cranes. According to the four-year study of the BCN (which was conducted in Mustang), around 20,000 cranes enter Nepal from Kaligandaki corridor every year. Ornithologists said that these birds can fly at around 7,900 meters of height. The National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act has kept Demoiselle cranes under the list of protected species.



A swoop of the cranes flying over the Himalayas to reach India in search of warmer climate.

POST PHOTO

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli lays a wreath on the memorial for martyred police personnel at Nepal Police headquarters in Kathmandu on the occasion of Nepal Police Day on Friday.

Continued from page 1

ANISH TIWARI
SINDHU PALCHOK OCT 11

© 2006 The Authors
Journal compilation © 2006 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Saturday

- 4:30pm-5:30pm** : Chinese President Xi Jinping lands at Tribhuvan International Airport where he will be received by President Bidya Devi Bhandari.
- 6:30pm** : Xi and Bhandari hold talks at the Office of the President, Sheela Niwas
- 7:30pm** : President Bhandari hosts a dinner for Xi and the Chinese delegation at Hotel Soaltee
- Sunday**
- 9:30am** : Bilateral meeting between Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Xi at Hotel Soaltee, followed by the signing of some agreements
- 11:00am** : Ruling Nepal Communist Party co-chair and former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal calls on Xi
- 11:30am** : Nepali Congress President and former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba calls on Xi
- 12:30pm** : Xi and the Chinese delegation depart for Beijing from Tribhuvan International Airport

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, OCT

Ram Baran Yadav

2011 16 1

Bhrikuti Rai and Anil Giri
contributed reporting

EDITORIAL

Walking the tightrope

Xi's visit is likely to have tremendous political significance but how Nepal calibrates its foreign policy will be key.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will be arriving in Kathmandu today for a two-day state visit at the invitation of President Bidya Devi Bhandari. As the first visit by a Chinese president since Jiang Zemin landed in Kathmandu in 1996, it is likely to have tremendous political significance. Xi, considered the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, wields tremendous power not just in China but across the world. His ambitious flagship project—the Belt and Road Initiative—seeks to connect the region through massive investments in infrastructure projects. Xi, however, has also been heavily criticised for stifling dissent, cracking down on opposition and incarcerating the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

Ever since bilateral relations were established in 1955, Nepal has done little to displease its large northern neighbour. Nepal has time and again expressed its steadfast adherence to the One-China Policy and ever since the 2015 Indian blockade, Nepal has sought to cultivate better relations with China, albeit as a countervailing force to heavy dependence on India. KP Sharma Oli negotiated a trade and transit agreement with China in 2016 and Pushpa Kamal Dahal enthusiastically signed up for the Belt and Road Initiative in early 2017. Nepal has also long kept its Tibetan refugee population on a tight leash, cracking down on any form of protest against China. More recently, the ruling Nepal Communist Party even conducted a two-day training programme on Xi Jinping Thought—the guiding doctrine of the Communist Party of China. Oli has time and again dangled the carrot of Chinese support to win over the public, promising a cross-border railway connecting Kathmandu with Kerung.

However, little of what was promised has materialised. None of the nine projects identified under the Belt and Road Initiative has moved forward, although that is more Nepal's fault than China's. The Chinese have even asked Nepal to be patient as the promised cross-border railway is likely to take a long time. But Nepal's fascination with China, and especially its economic heft, has continued unabated.

While a visit by the Chinese president is most welcome, Nepal must realise the full extent of Chinese interest in Nepal and the region. For all its economic might, China remains a one-party state with a poor human rights record. Under Xi, the Communist Party of China has cracked down on Uighurs and has provoked Hong Kong into full-blown rebellion. The *casus belli* for Hong Kong's revolt was an extradition treaty—a similar treaty is on the agenda of discussion during Xi's time in Kathmandu. There is little doubt that for China, this treaty is aimed squarely towards Tibetan refugees. Although officials say an agreement on extradition is unlikely, there will come a time when Nepal will have to decide whether Chinese aid is worth compromising on fundamental democratic values. Chinese support might seem like it comes with few strings attached but as many African countries are increasingly finding out, there is always a price to be paid.

This is, of course, not to say that Nepal should reject Chinese aid. It should not. China is a friendly nation and a long-time development partner. Trade between the two countries reached \$1.1 billion and Chinese investments in Nepal exceeded \$300 million last year alone. But as China and India vie for greater influence in South Asia, Nepal may increasingly find itself in the geopolitical crosshairs. This tussle for power between the two giants demonstrates that Nepal's foreign policy has now reached inflection point. Nepal could reaffirm its traditional alignment with India or break from precedent and fortify ties with China.

However, the more prudent strategy would be to maintain its sovereign decision making regardless of Beijing and New Delhi's interests. Nepal would do well to remember that no great power foreign policy is benign.

We want to hear from you

We regularly publish Letters to the Editor on contemporary issues or direct responses to something the Post has recently published. Please send your letters to tkpoped@kmg.com.np with 'Letter to the Editor' in the subject line.

Please include your address, phone number we can reach you at and your email address.

Keep it short. Your letters will have a better chance of success if you keep it within 400 words. If you're writing commentary, pitch an op-ed instead.

Have something to say?

The Kathmandu Post invites you to submit well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces. To make sure your articles get our attention, we ask that you keep the following things in mind when inquiring and submitting content to the Post:

All your opinion pieces should be pitched to the Opinion desk—not to the editor-in-chief. Email your piece or idea (accompanied with a high-resolution headshot) to tkpoped@kmg.com.np.

We will only respond to pitches that have original ideas. We suggest that you google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that either the Post or other publications have already covered in the past, tell us in a sentence or two why your story offers something new.

The Post receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers, students, political commentators, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We are not able to respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you soon. Please DO NOT pitch us an idea if you're already pitching it somewhere else.

We carefully review submissions to ensure that no plagiarism has occurred. If we find any articles that have been plagiarised, such practice will lead to blacklisting.

Finally, please tell us who you are in a sentence or two when you send us your story ideas. We want to know where you have published before or what your expertise is on the topic you're interested in exploring.

Don't count on divine intervention



SHUTTERSTOCK

Dashain is the time to worship the goddess, have a terrific time, and that's where the story should end.

PRAMOD MISHRA

CROSSROADS



The Dashain (Dasami, Dussehra or Durgapuja for others) festival always makes me nostalgic about the innocence of my teenage years in a village in eastern Nepal. The goat meat (meagre though it was), the fair on the 10th day, visits to friends' homes and all-night performances of the epics made me forget the complications of the world.

The blessings of Dashain continues unabated from the elders to the younger family members. This 10-day festival's blessing extends even now for five days. While pundits invoke all 10 forms of the goddess, many elders in the family chant Chandi or Durgasaptashati, which is also known as Devi Mahatmya. And there are mantras chanted while giving blessings during the last five days.

Mantra chanting

The essence of all this mantra chanting is to praise the power-goddess for her mythical acts of taming and killing a havoc-causing demon named Mahishasur, literally the devil disguised as a bull buffalo. This incident in the scriptures marks the creation of binary between the cow and the buffalo, good and evil. The mantra of blessing itself, through a series of literary tropes invoking prominent mythical figures, endows the receiver of the blessing with long life, enviable wealth and fame, the annihilation of enemies, unparalleled wisdom, uncompromising truthfulness, indomitable strength, certain victory in battle and so on.

While I am all for receiving and

giving these blessings, the years of higher education have robbed me of my village innocence. I now find that even centuries or millennia of Durga worship has failed to make the Hindus prosperous enough to create more than a handful of billionaires among a billion Hindus. Hindustan remained under colonialism for centuries. Instead, those who didn't invoke the power-goddess and received or gave Durga blessings ruled India and siphoned off much of its wealth, leaving millions of Indians to die of disease and famine.

But most important of all, even after millennia of Durga worship, many evils still rule Hindu societies. One of the most despicable evils is the caste system. Oppression of fellow Hindu Dalits (the oppressed) in the form of practising untouchability continues in most Hindu societies. Which goddess Durga is going to kill this evil animal? In fact, it is not even animal, poor species getting blamed for all kinds of human failings. Instead, it is Hindu men and women who practice untouchability against their fellow co-religionists. Who is going to kill this demon that lies in the minds or hearts of caste Hindus?

The victory of good over evil, therefore, like the blessing of other noble, desirable goals, cannot happen just by

chanting mantras. Their psychological effect may be palpable, but their social and worldly value is nil. If only by chanting and invoking evil were to disappear, Hindu society would have become a magical paradise. Equality rather than hierarchy, humanity rather than dehumanisation of fellow humans, justice rather than injustice, truth rather than hypocrisy would have prevailed.

Instead, old Mahishasur has been replaced by or taken on the form of a new set of demons—Moloch and Midas, who have spread their wings everywhere in South Asia, demanding the sacrifice of street urchins and blessing the Midas of today with petrified sensibilities. Is it the passive act of wishing all the good things that have set Hindu society adrift? Where are the wealth-giving Bill Gates and Warren Buffets among the Hindus who could endow public causes? For all the blame that Anand Girdhardas (*Winner Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*) heaps on the Gates and Buffets, their wealth has done some public good across the globe. Andrew Carnegie endowed American public libraries. It's not Mukesh Ambani and near to home Binod Chaudhary, but Azim Premji who pledges to give away his wealth for civic causes.

Towards a shared future



SHUTTERSTOCK

Chinese sincerely hope that neighbouring countries will take the ride of China's fast economic growth and share the opportunities.

China has the sincerity and ability to play a constructive role in Nepal's economic and social development where it wants to create a win-win situation for both countries. The ultimate goal of Nepal's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative is to cement its ties with China further. This includes narrowing the gap between Nepal and China, and the rest of the world. Like its cooperation with other countries, China can also obtain economic benefits from its links with Nepal. More importantly, the increasing interconnection in this process will bring the two countries closer together.

This will reinforce peace and stability not only for China and Nepal but also for the whole region. Thus, from a long-term perspective, enhancing connectivity between the two countries is the beginning to realising a shared future.

Nepal's foreign policy has been

adjusting in a directionless manner in the past few years, yet it is still fair enough to conclude that its core spirit is pursuing a more diversified policy, which can be summarised as dynamic balancing when it comes to political relations and diversification in maintaining economic ties.

By deepening cooperation with China through the Belt and Road Initiative, and being linked to the world's second-largest economy, Nepal is injecting new vitality into its domestic economy and opening broader prospects. Geographical location and historical factors had long kept the country isolated from the world. What's more, a protracted period of political instability took a heavy toll on the country. But now that the country has embarked on a journey to stability and prosperity, the newfound zeal to open up integrate into the world, which has been proven to be an effective way to promote development in China, should also be a consensus among all walks of life in Nepal.

The much-anticipated President Xi's visit to Nepal will definitely add

But the worst of them all have been the Hindu rulers. Even if one discounts the luxury-loving tyrants they called kings (righteous kings dwell only in the utopian world of the myths), avowedly Hindu rulers in the largest democracy haven't overcome evil, as Durga's blessings and invocations suggest. Instead, they are spreading hatred and fear against others, which are nothing but forms of evil.

Democratise the institutions

At home in Nepal, the goddess may have helped to overthrow the tyrannical monarchy (I'm aware that the atheist Maoists would fiercely oppose my suggestion and would like to take full credit themselves for the removal of the monarchy), but she hasn't instilled good sense in Nepal's elected rulers. Democracy brought them to state power; but they refuse to democratise the country's institutions, such as the universities, where they pick and drop university officials as though they were pawns.

So, I would say let's worship the goddess, play cards or read books as you like, eat meat or vegetables, sacrifice live animals or gourds; but don't depend too much on her for good things in life and society. Following Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1725) and its 20th century interpreters, like Edward Said, I would say whether the goddess blesses us or not with the good things in society in place of evil, her worshippers would do better to take control of their society and country to make it better themselves. Because humans have shaped society, it's them, not some gods or goddesses, who can change it for the better. Rather than praying and blessing or, better yet, with prayers and blessings, do or say something everyday to rid Hindu society of the evils of untouchability, sexism, cultural chauvinism, illiteracy, inequity, inertia caused by poverty, selfishness and hubris caused by wealth and power. If followers of the goddess show such initiatives, she may well really bless in concrete terms not too far in the future.

Mishra is the department chair of English Studies at Lewis University in the United States.

new dynamics to the Nepal-China relations. Since May 2017, China and Nepal signed the Memorandum of Understanding on BRI, the two countries have made remarkable progress in the areas of interconnection, investing, trading, and personnel exchanges. This is undoubtedly a good start. From hydro projects to building infrastructure, China has been making inroads into Nepal along with enjoying a cordial relationship with the political leadership. Now that the Belt and Road Initiative has entered its sixth year, its cooperating models and paths are getting more mature. Now, after two years of running-in and preparation, the cooperation between the two countries under the framework of BRI will undoubtedly expedite. The speed of implementing projects shall be accelerated, broader fields shall be involved and more agreements shall be reached upon.

The differences in the political system, cultural and social environment between China and Nepal are facts, but this should not be an obstacle in deepening cooperation, for the people of both countries have the same yearning for a better life and share the same determination. In 1996, when Chinese President Jiang Zemin was visiting Nepal, the country was heading into a prolonged political turmoil. people's demands for embarking on the path of prosperity are stronger than ever. In the past 23 years, China has also undergone more profound reforms and changes. The two countries are sharing better connections, closer ties, and broader prospects. At such a moment, we have good reasons to put higher expectations to the forthcoming visit and the future of Nepal-China relations.

Liang is a PhD student at Sichuan University, China. His research is focused on China's relations with Nepal.

Abiy Ahmed: Meteoric rise of the man trying to remould Ethiopia

Having just completed his first year in office, the Ethiopian Prime Minister has already been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

ROBBIES COREY-BOULET

The son of poor villagers, a spy boss, and now the man behind dizzying attempts to reform Africa’s fastest-growing economy and heal wounds with Ethiopia’s neighbours, Abiy Ahmed has seen an unpredictable and peril-strewn rise to fame.

Another chapter was added to his remarkable tale on Friday when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Since becoming Ethiopian prime minister in April 2018, the 43-year-old has aggressively pursued policies that have the potential to upend his country’s society and reshape dynamics beyond its borders.

Within just six months of his swearing-in, Abiy made peace with bitter foe Eritrea, released dissidents from jail, apologised for state brutality, and welcomed home exiled armed groups branded “terrorists” by his predecessors.

More recently he has turned to fleshing out his vision for the economy while laying the groundwork for elections currently scheduled to take place next May.

But analysts fret that his policies are, simultaneously, too much too fast for the political old guard, and too little too late for the country’s angry youth, whose protests swept him to power.

Despite the challenges, Abiy’s allies predict his deep well of personal ambition will prompt him to keep swinging big.

Tareq Sabt, a businessman and friend of Abiy’s, says one of the first things that struck him when they met was the prime minister’s drive: “I always said to friends, when this guy comes to power, you’ll see a lot of change in Ethiopia.”

‘Sleeping on the floor’

Born in the western town of Beshasha to a Muslim father and Christian mother, Abiy “grew up sleeping on the floor” in a house that lacked electricity and running water.

“We used to fetch water from the river,” he said in a wide-ranging radio interview with Sheger FM last month, adding that he didn’t even see electricity or an asphalt road until the seventh



In this file photo taken on September 15, 2019 Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed gestures after receiving a horse as a gift from the elders of the Kafficho ethnic group.

grade.

Yet Abiy progressed quickly through the power structures created by the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), after it took power from the Derg military junta in 1991.

Fascinated with technology, he joined the military as a radio operator while still a teenager.

He rose to lieutenant-colonel before entering government, first as a securocrat—he was the founding head of Ethiopia’s cyber-spying outfit, the Information Network Security Agency.

He then became a minister in the capital Addis Ababa, and a party official in his home region of Oromia.

Seizing the moment

The circumstances that led to Abiy’s ascent to high office can be traced to late 2015.

A government plan to expand the capital’s administrative boundaries into the surrounding Oromia region was seen as a land grab sparking protests led by the Oromo, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, and the Amhara people.

States of emergency and mass arrests—typical EPRDF tactics—worked to quell the protests but failed to address the underlying grievances.

When then-prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn abruptly resigned, many feared a power-struggle within the EPRDF, or even an unravelling of the coalition that would leave a dangerous

“My feeling is that he’s prepared for this moment all his life.”

vacuum.

Instead, the coalition’s member parties chose Abiy to become the first Oromo prime minister.

“He’s the only one that could have saved the EPRDF,” said Mohammed Ademo, a journalist who accompanied Abiy on his first visit to the large Ethiopian diaspora community in the United States last year.

“My feeling is that he’s prepared for this moment all his life.”

As prime minister, Abiy has sought to shape events across the Horn of Africa, fuelling criticism that he is taking on too much at once.

Beyond the rapprochement with Eritrea, for which he was cited for the Nobel, he has played a leading role in mediating

Sudan’s political crisis and has also tried to revive South Sudan’s uncertain peace deal.

Yet whether any of these initiatives will ultimately succeed is an open question.

Even the Eritrea deal, which many see as Abiy’s signature achievement to date, has been undermined by a lack of tangible progress on critical issues like border demarcation.

“Abiy has had real foreign policy successes, but there has been some misguided optimism from abroad that he can transform the Horn of Africa,” said James Barnett, an analyst specialising in East Africa at the American Enterprise Institute.

“The Horn is volatile. I’m sceptical that one leader can undo decades of competition and mistrust.”

Assassination bid

The immediate demands of Ethiopian politics may leave Abiy with no choice but to shift his focus inward in the months to come.

Holding credible elections by next May, the current timeline, is a daunting task, yet Abiy is keen on scoring the kind of victory that would give him a mandate with the general public.

First, he must contend with Ethiopia’s formidable security challenges.

Ethnic violence has been on the rise in recent years, causing Ethiopia to record more internally displaced people last year than any other country.

And last June, Abiy faced the greatest threat yet to his hold on power when gunmen assassinated high-ranking officials including a prominent regional president and the army chief.

Abiy seems well aware of the danger he faces, and from time to time makes public reference to attempts on his own life, including a grenade attack at a rally just two months after he took his post.

For now, as he noted in the Sheger FM interview, he remains in control.

“There were many attempts so far, but death didn’t want to come to me,” he said. “Death shied away from me.”

—Agence France-Presse

Turkey bombards Syrian Kurdish militia, thousands flee as death toll mounts

In recent overnight operations, the Turkish military and its Syrian rebel allies killed 49 Kurdish militants.

DAREN BUTLER

ISTANBUL, OCT 11

Syria on the third day of an offensive that has killed hundreds of people, forced tens of thousands to flee and turned Washington’s establishment against President Donald Trump.

Since Trump pulled US troops out of the way following a phone call with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, the incursion has opened a major new front in the eight-year-old Syrian civil war and drawn fierce criticism internationally.

“We have one of three choices: Send in thousands of troops and win Militarily, hit Turkey very hard Financially and with Sanctions, or mediate a deal between Turkey and the Kurds!” Trump said in a Twitter post on Thursday.

“I hope we can mediate,” Trump said when asked about the options by reporters at the White House.

Without elaborating, Trump said the United States was “going to possibly do something very, very tough with respect to sanctions and other financial things” against Turkey.

On Friday morning, Turkish jets and artillery struck around Syria’s Ras al Ain, one of two border towns that have been the focus of the offensive. Gunfire could also be heard inside the town, said a Reuters journalist in Ceylanpinar, on the Turkish side of the border.

He said a convoy of 20 armoured vehicles carrying Syrian rebels entered Syria from Ceylanpinar on Friday. Some of them made victory signs, shouted “Allahu akbar” (God is greatest) and waved Syrian rebel flags as they advanced towards Ras al Ain. Some 120 km west, Turkish howitzers resumed shelling near the Syrian town of Tel Abyad, a witness said.

Turkey’s Defence Ministry said that in overnight operations the Turkish military and its Syrian rebel allies killed 49 Kurdish militants. It says it has killed 277 mili-



Members of Syrian National Army stand on top of an armoured vehicle in Ceylanpinar.

NATO member Turkey says the operation is necessary for border security.

tants in total.

The ministry said one Turkish soldier was killed in a clash on Thursday during the offensive, which is targeting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the Kurdish YPG militia.

Kurds said they were resisting the assault. At least 23 fighters with the SDF and six fighters with a Turkish-backed Syrian rebel group had been killed, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war.

NATO member Turkey says the operation is necessary for border security against the YPG militia, which it designates a terrorist group because of ties to militants who have waged a decades-old insurgency in southeast Turkey in which more than 40,000 people have been killed.

Ankara has also said it intends to create a “safe zone” for the return of millions of refugees to Syria.

Islamic State captives

The SDF have been the main allies of US forces on the ground in the battle against Islamic State since 2014. They have been holding thousands of captured IS fighters in prisons and tens of thousands of their relatives in detention.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called for an emergency meeting of the coalition of more than 30 countries created to

fight Islamic State.

SDF forces were still in control of all prisons with Islamic State captives, a senior US State Department official said in a briefing with reporters on Thursday.

The United States has received a high-level commitment from Turkey on taking responsibility for Islamic State captives but had not yet had detailed discussions, the official said.

US lawmakers have said Trump gave Erdogan the green light to go into Syria but the official disputed that. “We gave them a very clear red light, I’ve been involved in those red lights and I know the president did that on Sunday,” the official said.

The SDF said Turkish air strikes and shelling had killed nine civilians. In apparent retaliation by Kurdish-led forces, six people including a 9-month-old baby were killed by mortar fire into Turkish towns, Turkish officials said.

The International Rescue Committee aid group said 64,000 people in Syria have fled since the campaign began. The towns of Ras al Ain and Darbasiya, some 60 km (37 miles) to the east, were largely deserted.

The Observatory said Turkish forces seized two villages near Ras al Ain and five near Tel Abyad. A Syrian rebel forces spokesman said the towns were surrounded after fighters seized the villages around them.

Trump has faced rare criticism from senior figures in his Republican Party who accuse him of deserting US allies. US Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican who usually backs Trump, has been one of the most outspoken critics of the US troop withdrawal. He unveiled a framework for sanctions on Turkey with Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey would retaliate against any measure taken against it.

—Reuters

S Africa ex-leader Zuma to face corruption trial

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PIETERMARITZBURG, OCT 11

South Africa’s scandal-plagued former president Jacob Zuma will face a corruption trial, a court ruled Friday, in one of multiple alleged graft cases over his long political career.

The country’s High Court unanimously dismissed Zuma’s bid for a permanent stay of prosecution over 16 counts of fraud, racketeering and money laundering relating to a multi-billion-dollar arms deal dating back to before he took office in 2009.

Zuma, who has been accused of taking bribes from French defence company Thales, sought in March to have the case dropped. He maintained the case was politically-motivated.

But the trial is now scheduled to begin on Tuesday after High Court Judge Willie Seriti ruled that Zuma’s “application for the permanent stay is dismissed with costs”.

The judge agreed with the prosecution that parts of Zuma’s arguments to have the case thrown out were “scandalous and or vexatious”. The National Prosecutions Authority’s spokeswoman Natasha Kara told “the matter has been set down for trial from the 15th to the 18th of October”. Both Zuma and Thales have denied any wrongdoing, and the former president could still appeal the ruling, experts have suggested. But if it goes ahead, it would be the first time the former leader has stood trial on corruption charges, despite a serious of graft allegations.

‘Still going to drag’

State lawyer Wim Trengove had pushed for prosecution arguing that if Zuma did not face trial it gave the impression that he had received special treatment “because he is an important and a powerful man”. He also said Zuma’s claims that he was a victim of a “witch hunt” were unfounded.

Zuma, who was forced to resign last year over multiple graft allegations, is alleged to have taken the bribes during his time as a provincial economy minister and later as deputy president of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the 1990s.

The charges were first brought against Zuma in 2005. They were dropped by prosecutors in 2009, shortly before Zuma became president, and reinstated in 2016.

Thales said in a statement that it “notes the decision of the High Court” and was assessing its legal options.

Political analyst Xolani Dube warned that Zuma could lodge an “urgent” appeal. “There are also other avenues that the man might still use... he can still appeal so it’s still going to drag,” Dube told AFP, adding that the country may “not yet see him facing his alleged deeds”. Zuma, 77, claimed last year that he was so broke that he had to sell his socks to raise legal fees, after another court ruled he should front the bills.

The ANC party forced him to resign last year over a separate corruption scandal centred around the wealthy Gupta business family, who won lucrative contracts with state companies and allegedly held sway over his choice of cabinet ministers.

The court’s ruling on Friday came just a day after the US Treasury slapped sanctions on the three Indian-born Gupta brothers, calling them a “significant corruption network” that dispersed bribes and misappropriated millions in state funds.

Zuma also appeared before a judicial inquiry in July that is probing allegations he organised a systematic plunder of government coffers in a scandal known as “state capture”. A few days later he pulled out of the inquiry saying that he had been “treated as someone who was accused”. But he later agreed to return at a future date.



WE'LL PICK A FIGHT,
AND WE'LL GET IT RIGHT.



OYSTER

Great journalism takes time and resources.
Great journalism is unblemished and unvarnished.
At The Post, we devote time and resources to write
stories about power and influence, without fear or favour.

kathmandupost.com/investigations

THE KATHMANDU POST
WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR